

## EDITORIAL

### Physicians and Politics

CALIFORNIA, and the entire nation, last month witnessed a general election which has caused many physicians, among others, to reconsider their own political and social points of view.

Over the Republican protest that a "New Deal" was again trying to establish itself in the state and the nation, the Democratic party proceeded to elect its members into majority positions in both state and federal legislative bodies.

Whether or not the give-away philosophy which so many medical men decry will prevail, time alone can tell. It is obvious in our own state that financial stringency will be bound to intrude into any programs of public generosity which must be financed out of new sources of taxation.

Regardless of the outcome of the voting, this would appear to be a good occasion for reminding the physicians of this great commonwealth of their privileges, responsibilities and limitations in political campaigns—as individuals and, in some regards, as members of a medical association.

First of all, the California Medical Association is a non-partisan, non-political body. Its membership includes adherents of all recognized political parties. The practice of medicine is not one of political partisanship.

Second, the right of all individuals to express their personal political opinions is recognized by the Constitution of the United States in the guarantee to all citizens of the right of free speech.

The right to communicate with public officials is reserved to all citizens under the state and federal constitutional provisions guaranteeing the right to petition. Under this right any citizen has the privilege of requesting his legislative representatives to vote one way or the other on any legislative proposal.

Under these constitutional guarantees, all physicians, as well as their neighbors, are given ample opportunity to voice their opinions to their duly elected representatives in the state or federal legislative bodies.

On the opposite side of the coin, citizens are definitely bound by laws as to what they may not do in legislative matters. They may not attempt to pledge a candidate for office as to his vote for or against a specific piece of legislation. They may not bribe, or attempt by menace, deceit, suppression of truth, or any corrupt means to influence the vote of an elected official for or against a specific proposal. They may not, by coercion or similar means, assume the position of counting in advance a vote for or against a particular legislative measure.

The California Medical Association has long been aware of both the privileges and prohibitions of citizenship and of organizations of citizens. The Association has held itself aloof from party, from candidates and from all ballot propositions which do not directly affect the public health or the practice of medicine.

The Association has long recognized the difference between proposals which appeal to physicians as citizens and those which concern them as guardians of the public health. A stand may be taken by the Association only on proposals of the latter kind and only as they affect all physicians on an equal basis, not as party members or proponents or opponents of a specific issue.

The California Medical Association, like other professional associations, maintains within itself a system of government by which it arrives at the position the Association will take officially.

A Committee on Legislation functions throughout the year as a key committee under the Commission on Public Policy. This committee, in turn, works very closely with the Public Health League of Cali-

fornia, which maintains expert professional representatives in Sacramento during legislative sessions.

The Public Health League of California is non-partisan and is not a policy-making body. It voices in accordance with the decisions of the respective professional organizations encompassed by its activities. In the case of the California Medical Association, the Public Health League and the CMA Committee on Legislation seek the advice of the Council before taking a position on any legislation proposed in the state capitol.

Deviation from this clear-cut channel of communication has caused the officials of the Association considerable concern, especially during the trying and competitive political campaigns just ended. The Council is now requesting all the official bodies within the Association to follow the fixed form for arriving at an expression of the Association's position when public policy is involved.

The Council at the same time is making clear to all concerned that legislative proposals by any member, committee, group or other combination will always be given careful consideration. If a proposal appears to merit the taking of an official position, the Council can decide on that point.

The stature of the medical profession increases or decreases in the public mind in proportion to the objectivity and public interest displayed by its official policies and representatives. Over a long period of years, the profession's position has been maintained on a very high plane.

Members of the Association should consider this standing before implying Association support of their points of view. Members should also remember that the profession may prosper in the political climate only if it represents a true objective point of view.

